

we can't go on just running away by LazyBaker

Series: [falling for you in hawkins, indi-fucking-ana \[1\]](#)

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Summary:

Billy gets his camaro back.

1. “I can work with that.”

When Billy wakes up, Steve and the kids are gone. Max is *gone*. His fucking camaro is *gone*. His neck fucking hurts and he’s moving so slow it’s become a commitment to just get his feet on the ground and the rest of him upright. Walking is now trial and error and he trips more times than he manages to take a step—his knees are goddamn wobbling and he’s actually starting to panic, which, *fuck that shit*.

Fuck Max.

Fuck Steve.

Fuck Hawkins, Indi-fucking-ana

He makes it out the front door eventually. The time on his watch might as well be a goddamn mystery. It’s still dark, though. Still cold. There are skid marks from where his car had been parked and Billy looks out at that empty space of road, tries to light up a cigarette, but his hands are shaking and just won’t fucking work so he stuffs his lighter back into his pocket and spits out the cigarette.

The pounding in his head is worse and gets even louder knowing he’s going to have to walk back to Neil without Max—Susan’s precious little girl, Neil’s ticket to a happy wife—*gone*. And his fucking car—he can already feel Neil snarling at him about being irresponsible—never mind that Billy had paid for it with his own money and kept it running and washed it every damn Sunday.

His jacket is still on the ground where he’d left it. He picks it up. Blood rushes to his head and he nearly falls over. He pats off the dirt and puts it on.

It’s a long walk back home. The lights in the house are still on. There’s a very specific type of dread swelling inside of Billy, it’s familiar and keeps him rooted to the curb until he sees a curtain in the front window move. He braces himself and expects the worst and gets the worst because if there’s one thing Neil Hargrove doesn’t half-ass when it comes to parenting, it’s letting his son know just how disappointed he is in him.

Billy keeps it together. Keeps his mouth shut. Keeps his hands loose and at his sides. Says what he's supposed to. Takes it.

Shit happens, Billy thinks, *the same fucking routine as always and it'll happen again and again and again so lets just get this the fuck over with already*. He wants to pass out on his bed and whatever tranquilizer Max shot him up with is wearing off and he'd really like to ride the numbing train into sleep for the next three hours before he has to go to school—a test in chemistry he doesn't want to miss—but that's only if his dad doesn't knock him out first.

Neil gets sluggish, his fists get slower and eventually he tires himself out and takes Billy by the back of his jacket and shoves him outside. Slams the door shut before Billy can even turn his head to look. Susan is crying somewhere in the house. Billy has to bite his bloody, split open lip to keep from laughing.

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The sun is just starting to rise making the whole forest bullshit look like a postcard. Max had called nearly thirty minutes ago. He doesn't know what excuse she had used, he doesn't really care. He hasn't tried to get back into the house. It's cold—it's always so fucking cold in this shit place—but Billy likes it better out here where there are walls and doors and locks that separate him and Neil and goddamn Susan. Where he could just get up and walk away. Nothing to hold him against. Nowhere to contain him. He has an out in every direction.

Billy is sitting on the stoop and smoking his last cigarette. He's hunched over with his hands shoved into his jacket pockets. There's no such thing as a comfortable position out on the front porch. Every inch of his body is throbbing. His head might actually explode. His face is overheated and swollen—Neil knows better than to hit somewhere so visible and obvious and fucking telling, but he's more pissed off than he'd been when they had to move here and anger makes someone like Neil fucking dumb as shit. Billy can only poke at

and wonder what the fuck his smashed in face looks like now.

Like an ugly fuckin' faggot, Billy snickers to himself, cigarette bouncing in his hand when he covers his mouth, rubs at his sore jaw. His knuckles are raw and when he bends his fingers they crack and start to bleed all over again. He sucks on one punched-off patch, licking at the blood and doesn't think of Steve.

Billy pushes his knuckles against the worn down wooden step he's sitting on, making a trail of red. He imagines punching Neil in his face. Bashing his ugly-ass mustache right into his fucking mouth and setting the entire house on fire while Neil is passed out inside. Susan is inside too. Max can go fuck off and fend for herself.

He hears his camaro before he sees it. *That* rumble is home and family in every way that matters.

Steve parks Billy's car in front of the house and Billy stays where he is, doesn't move. He sucks on what's left of his cigarette. Ignores Max when she comes bulldozing for the house, keeping a wide berth between them. He doesn't look at her. She probably doesn't look at him either—if she does, it's not a look Billy wants to see right now.

He's not angry with her, which is funny. It's incredibly funny. Billy is smiling it's just that fucking hilarious.

He grinds the stub out on the porch because *fuck it*. Steve is out of the car and he's got the keys in one hand and the murder bat in the other and isn't moving any closer, watching Billy like Billy didn't just personally change the shape of his face with his fists.

King Motherfucking Steve. Billy grins. Gets up. Takes his time. There's no hurry—his camaro is here—sure, it's dinged up and scratched to fucking hell and it's going to be a goddamn bitch to repair, but it's *here*—and so is Steve and Billy is *delighted* when Steve keeps his head up, meets Billy's eyes like a champ, his shoulders squared with his feet fucking planted and ready for impact. *Good*.

Billy stops just out of range of the bat's swing, standing on the curb while Steve's on the asphalt. Like this, Billy has got a few inches on him and he gets to look down at Steve. It's a nice view to have.

Up close, Steve looks even shittier. Billy imagines they've got the same bruises, the same cuts, the same angry storm of blues and reds marring the foundations of their faces. Steve's got rainbow bandaids peeling off of his forehead and chin. Billy wants to rip them off with his teeth and see what's under there.

"What's with the blood?" He nods to the bat. There's red and something stringy on the nails and the wood.

Steve's confused, giving him that doe-ish wide eyed look, but then his eyes harden and he's glaring and the look he gives Billy right then fucking ignites the entire world inside of him.

"What's with the face?" Steve says. "Don't think I hit you that hard."

Billy doesn't bother trying to hold it in anymore. He laughs.

He moves closer, leans against the side of his camaro, the metal cold against his hip. He wants to press his face against it—cool down the heat left behind by Neil. Billy hooks his thumbs in his pockets, going for casual as fuck. Steve doesn't move. Doesn't back away. He stands there with his back straight and his guard up and keeps Billy in his sight, just where Billy wants to be.

"Wanna get high?" Billy says. Steve gives him that '*what the fuck are you talking about, Hargrove*' look he usually does and it's like they're back in the locker room.

Susan will be too worried and too occupied keeping Max in her sight, which means Neil will be too and Neil isn't going to want to see Billy's face for a while. Days like this, where the proof is written so plainly in view for anyone to see, are days where Billy gets a little bit more freedom.

Steve doesn't outright reject him. He's thinking about it and Billy watches him think about it.

"You gonna hit me again?"

"You touch my sister?"

"No—" Steve balks, that careful guard he built up cracking. "How

many times do I have to tell you that. *No*, Jesus Christ.”

Billy shrugs. He’s grinning. It hurts. “Then *no*, I’m not gonna hit ya. You gonna use that bat?”

“Haven’t decided yet.”

Billy gets it, understands the sentiment. “I can work with that.”

“Shit.” Steve brushes his hair back, looks to the camaro then to his watch and finally back to Billy with a face that says he’s about to make a decision he’s going to regret—*smart and pretty, the whole goddamn package*.

“Fuck it,” Steve says, “yeah. Okay.”

In the car, Billy takes a quick look at himself in the rearview mirror—it’s as bad as Steve’s face and there’s blood drying practically *everywhere* coming from *somewhere*, he can’t tell so he stops looking. His eyes aren’t swollen shut and he didn’t lose any teeth. *Good enough*.

Steve settles the bat between his knees, one hand always on the handle. Billy guesses it’s more about preventing the nails from scraping at the interior and his legs than anything defensive. The inside of a camaro isn’t anywhere big enough to swing a bat with any amount of force.

School has already started. They’ve officially missed first period. It’s the first time Billy has skipped in years and it makes him press on the gas pedal harder, turning up the volume on the console until he can feel the vibrations deep in his chest, *now I’m back in the ring to take another swing/‘cause the walls were shaking/the earth was quaking/my mind was aching*. Steve has got his other hand clutching at the dash in front of him when Billy takes a turn too fast, cursing under his breath just quiet enough that he probably thinks Billy can’t hear him, raising

his leg like he's pressing down on the brakes and Billy fucking lives for it.

The cliffside overlooking the quarry is near enough. Steve points him to which back roads to take and Billy lets him. He's been there before with Miriam Castellano—a senior who wears cherry lipgloss and likes to kiss more than just about anything else, which had been fine with Billy. Cherry is his favorite flavor and she could tie a knot with his tongue.

The spot is private, no one else is there, and there's a place to park his car where it won't draw any attention, no cop is going to drive by and see his blue camaro and know Billy Hargrove is somewhere he shouldn't be and Neil won't be getting any calls at work.

Steve is rubbing at his ears once they're out of the car, he calls over the hood, "I'm deaf now, you asshole."

"The bitches of Hawkins High are crying for you."

Steve glares at him, haughty and with his hand on his hip and his bat at his side—it's a good look for him and Billy's dying to call him pretty and mean it too much, but his knuckles still sting and Steve's face is still busted. Timing isn't right and he knows when to keep his mouth shut, even when it comes to Steve.

They settle against the side of the car, legs stretched out towards the quarry. There's enough space between them that their shoulders aren't touching. Steve's got his bat laid out by his legs, at the ready.

Billy lights up, his hands aren't shaking anymore and the lighter knows what's good for it and fucking works right away now that he's got Steve watching him. He got the weed from Tommy whose only redeeming trait is that he can get his hands on whatever Billy wants—his parents or his older brother? Billy doesn't know and can't find it in himself to listen to more than two words at a time when it comes to Tommy's dumbass mouth.

Billy takes a long pull from it and hands it to Steve, watches too closely when his lips wrap around the joint. Red and swollen and bruised—that dark purple just settling in for a long stay. It's gonna

fucking hurt every time Steve opens his mouth to talk or eat or *smile*.

It's a dumb thought to have. Billy knocks his head against the camaro and tries to stare out at the rock walls of the quarry and find them interesting.

They don't talk much, it's not exactly a comfortable silence but Billy has no idea what one of those is like anyways. The tension is smoked out of them and soon they're lying flat on their backs and Steve's shoulder is close enough that Billy is so aware of him and how warm his body is.

Billy keeps his eyes locked on anywhere other than Steve's face, looks at the sky—it's cloudless and blue like it had been in California, just colder and with different trees. Billy can almost pretend he's still there, can almost picture the sound of the ocean, can almost feel the dirt he's lying on change into the sand on the beach, can almost taste the salt in the air.

They pass the joint between them until there's only a few drags left. The paper is damp and tinged pink from both of their split lips.

It's damn near *pleasant* and Billy is melting into the ground and the pain is distant now, it's at the bottom of the cliffside, far away from him. Weed does that for him. Rounds the edges. Gets him warm. Gets him hard. He should smoke it more often, but Neil knows the smell.

There are birds chirping, the wind is *rustling* through the trees—it's goddamn quiet and abruptly Billy can't hear Steve breathing and he thinks he's left because why *the fuck* wouldn't he. What kind of fucking idiot would stay here with *Billy*?

Billy turns his head to look—he has to—and Steve is staring at him. His eyes are bloodshot. He's got dirt and leaves in his hair and he's so much closer than Billy remembers. *Fuck*.

Billy digs his fingers into the dirt, bites at the joint in his mouth, he practically fucking squirms he's so fucking hot and his legs are spreading and—*fucking christ*—he's so damn hard.

Steve Fucking Harrington.

It's difficult to look away, but Billy does. He glares at the sky and the bumfuck trees that make home seem like it's on a different fucking planet and turns his hands into fists, finds that sting and clutches at it with everything he has. The *pleasant* quiet between them shifts and it's entirely Billy's fault.

So he says, "you got a good right hook."

"What?"

"*You* got a good right hook for a pretty boy." Billy says again. He's hard and Steve is *right the fuck there* and weed always tells Billy's self preservation instincts to fuck off, so he sucks on the joint and blows the smoke in Steve's face because he can and he likes how Steve gets that angry twitch in his forehead.

He passes it to Steve and doesn't look away when he brings it to his mouth. Billy licks his lips, pushes his shirt up and rests his hands on his bare stomach, feels that flutter that leads to bad things and scratches at it with his nails.

"Dick." Steve says and takes a drag. "You're such a fucking asshole. You should know that." Billy laughs—he might actually be fucking giggling—and their shoulders knock into each other. "Just the biggest shithead. It'd be impressive if you weren't, you know, just the hugest, damn shittiest shithead ever."

Billy keeps laughing, he doesn't think he can stop. There are tears in his eyes and he rubs them away with the heel of his hand.

Steve shakes his head, the joint dangling delicately from his fingers. He's melted too. The *fuck you* is under there, but it comes out lazy through the haze of the smoke.

"Yeah, yeah. Scare some kids and bash my brains in, *hilarious*. I think George Carlin has a bit like that."

Billy shrugs, still fucking giggling like some lovesick chick with her tits out, slaps his hands against his stomach to *shook me all night long/ yeah you shook me all night long* then plucks the joint out of Steve's mouth, takes the last drag and leans over Steve to grind it into the

dirt next to his head. Steve's breath is on his neck and Billy fucking knows he shouldn't, that there's a line with no return he can't cross, so he toes at it, tests it, bends it just enough to see if he's gonna get scalded or not. He gets his leg over Steve and straddles him, sits his ass on Steve's thighs and grins down at him.

"The hell?" Steve says, his eyes are wide and he's got one hand in the air and one back on the bat and, yeah, not the best position considering the last few hours, but fuck it. Steve can push him into the quarry for all he cares. Neil would probably thank him and give Steve his camaro. Max'll give him a fucking hug. Susan will just keep crying like always.

"See," Billy grabs Steve's wrist and straightens it, bends his fingers into a fist. "Didn't have enough power behind it. Barely did shit to me. Gotta keep your wrist straight and use your hips." He reaches down and pinches the bony jut of Steve's hip—his jacket has slid up and so did his shirt and *he's so fucking thin, goddamn*—makes sure to keep his touch rough and quick.

Steve jumps, twitching and squirming under him and Billy is about to pop his fucking zipper.

"Are you—" Steve wiggles his hand out of Billy's hold, glaring up at him, "—are you seriously critiquing how I punched you?"

"Giving you *advice*. Someone's gotta teach a pretty boy like you how to defend themselves."

"That's what the bat is for, dipshit."

Billy grins. "Fuckwad."

"Dickhead."

"Motherfucker."

"Asshole."

"Chucklefuck."

"Air-headed fuck foot," Steve says and his lips are starting to turn

upwards and, fuck, he's smiling and he's still lying under Billy and his hair is splayed out everywhere and Billy wants to pick out the twigs and leaves tangled up inside.

"Thundercunt virgin."

"Mullet haired bitch."

Billy leans in, braces his hands on the ground next to Steve's head and lowers himself down until he can see the milky pink trails of the popped blood vessels in Steve's eyes and says, sweet and syrupy as he always does when he's got someone under him, "*princess.*"

"Oh, fuck off." Steve huffs, it sounds like it could be a laugh, and pushes Billy off of him with both hands. Billy doesn't fight it, goes with the momentum and rolls off to the side, back into his spot laughing the whole way.

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The sun is high above them, the shade has moved, his legs are warm and he doesn't care about Neil or the Byer's house or Max or the mystery tranquilizer in his system doing who the fuck knows what. The ground is cool on his back. The sun is a warm blanket over the haze of his high. Steve is right there. Their shoulders are pressed together and Steve hasn't moved away and Billy doesn't want to and he's not going to this time.

He feels hot, like he's not in Hawkins anymore, he's somewhere different where there's no one else other than Steve and his camaro and the rest of the planet has fucked the hell off like it should've done years ago.

Billy pulls his knees up and palms at himself through his jeans, plays with his belt buckle as he eyes the line and thinks it has some give left in it, that it can be bent just a tiny bit more today. The buzz in his chest and his head and his fucking dick from the weed and the injection have him unfastening his belt and he doesn't even breathe

when he pulls his zipper down and gets his cock out. The line is there. It's curved to shit.

Billy lets his eyes slide shut and sighs with that first tug, he's already dripping, wet like a girl. His head digs into the ground, his back arching as he speeds up. He hasn't jerked off in days and it's been since California that he's been able to do at least this with another guy.

"What—what are you doing?"

"Weed gets me revved up." Billy says and cuts himself off to bite at the moan that wants to come out. "Keep your eyes to yourself, or not. I'm not gonna judge, Harrington. You probably should see what a real dick looks like once in your life."

"God, why are you such a . . . " Steve trails off and it's quiet again, just the quarry and shitty nature and Billy's hand on his dick. There's a chance of Steve swinging that bat right between his legs, but there's a chance that Steve is watching him and that gets him moving his hand faster, the heat in his body coiled and ready to fucking spring.

"Holy shit. Shitshitshit. *Shit.*"

Billy listens to Steve fight with his belt then there's the zipper and that skin-on-skin sound of another hand jerking a dick, just as hurried and Billy changes his rhythm to match Steve's who's right arm is moving and rubbing against Billy's and it's only then that Billy can stomach opening his eyes and there's Steve Harrington looking right at him like he can't believe this is happening.

Neither can Billy, really, and just seeing Steve look at him while he's got a hand wrapped around his dick makes Billy come, biting the inside of his cheek, getting it all over his hand and his chest. Steve's arm is still moving and Billy finally looks down, sees Steve working his dick hard—*fuck, he's huge*. When it happens a second later Steve's eyes are pinched shut, his mouth open causing the split on his lip to reopen, he makes this soft sound that has Billy squeezing his dick, his chest fucking clenching.

Old panic has Billy looking away and back up at the sky. Fight or

flight. He doesn't want to do either, which is fucked in its own special way. Billy wipes his hand on the dirt. He zips and buckles himself back in and lays spread out, panting, listening to Steve tidy himself back up.

"You do that kind of," Steve pauses, awkward and unsure and out of breath and Billy feels like his skin has become four sizes too small, "that sort of *stuff* in California?"

Billy wishes he had more cigarettes or another joint with him to have something to do with his hands, to put his focus on anywhere other than Steve, so he digs his nails into his thigh.

"That your first time, Harrington? Fuck, you Indiana boys are boring." Billy says like it's normal, like it's just something guys with girlfriends do together when they're hanging out and Steve is the weird one who has something wrong inside of him.

—

Steve falls asleep. Billy is pissed and would jump off the cliff for a cigarette.

He's so goddamn stupid. Falling asleep beside Billy? After what he did? A baseball bat full of nails. A car. A fucking cliff. Billy may not be as tall as him, but he's thicker, has more muscles, knows how to fucking inflict damage, can pick that nerd up and toss him into the quarry without even trying.

Steve knows all this and he's asleep. Right there. Right next to Billy. Like he fucking trusts him or some shit. Exhausted, probably, like Billy is, but Steve should know better, should have better instincts than to pass out like that next to someone like him. *Damn is Steve fucking dumb.*

Billy is sitting up, knees drawn in towards his chest, and has been staring at Steve ever since he'd heard him snore.

He looks sweet asleep, bruises and all. There's blood and drool dribbling from his mouth like pink lemonade. Billy wants to kiss him, which is dumb. The dumbest fucking idea he's ever had in his life. So he keeps his hands to his sides. Loose. Watches Steve's eyes moving in his sleep, his chest going up and down as he breathes.

He tries to focus on something else. The weed is wearing off. School will be over in a few hours. He missed his chemistry test. Maybe he can make it up tomorrow, looking the way he does. Playing for pity makes him sick, but he can't fucking let his grades drop even a little. He can start work on fixing the camaro tonight. Neil is probably going to kill him once he sees the damage.

Steve makes a noise that sounds like a whine, turning over and curling towards Billy. Billy freezes. His hands are shaking and pushes himself away, putting space between them.

Billy doesn't think about it. He gets up and gets into his camaro—the car door slamming shut is what wakes Steve up and Billy *doesn't think about it* when he revs the engine, flips Steve off, and drives away from the quarry.

Steve can walk home for all Billy cares because fuck it and Steve fucking Harrington.

Notes for the Chapter:

If you want to talk about Billy in a crop top, come hit me up on [tumblr](#).

Title is from the song "Never" by Heart.

2. “Fuck off.”

Summary for the Chapter:

Steve locks himself out of his car.

Billy’s camaro kicks up a cloud of smoke. It gets in Steve’s eyes and mouth and nose—why wouldn’t it with him staring like an ass at the backside of the car.

He sneezes three times in quick succession. It fucking hurts. A lot. He thinks parts of his brain might have come out. Gently he wipes his nose on his sleeve. More blood, why not. He’s bleeding everywhere else. His vision blurs. He might be crying. He uses the collar of his shirt to wipe at his eyes and blearily looks at where Billy and his dumb car had been two seconds ago.

Just tire tracks on dirt. No camaro. No Billy.

There must be something wrong with Steve for him to feel *abandoned* by *Billy Hargrove*.

Jerk off with the guy who fucked you up and he ditches you—what’d you expect?

Coming down from the adrenaline of the last 24 hours only to have it spike back up—the fun buzz from the pot and the, *the fucking orgasm* fading alongside the camaro, leaving Steve with shaking knees about to buckle and a head that’s one big throbbing sore on his shoulders—he can’t pin point which to focus on first to avoid the full blown panic attack that’s coming for him.

He’s high. He’s alone in the woods. His face is pulsating in pain and blood and he might die—*he might actually die*. He set fire to a tunnel full of monsters. Helped avert the apocalypse. Got cheated on. Got dumped. Got his face beat in. Jerked off with Billy Hargrove because *that’s* apparently a thing he does now along with *fighting evil monsters*.

“What the fuck.” Steve says, talking to no one because he’s *alone*. In

the woods. Like an idiot. “What the *fuck*.”

He can't tell if his face is flushed or if that's just the heat from where Billy had shown off how he knew exactly how to punch and make it count. Like he's been in fights since he was born. Like it's as natural as the curls on his head. Like Steve is some amateur who doesn't know to keep his thumb on the outside and has never thrown a punch in his life. *Straighten your wrist and use your hips*. The little shit.

“Asshole.” Steve says to the tire tracks and to Billy and to the goddamn government and to every one of those demodogs in whatever dimension or hole they're in now and to every citizen in Hawkins, but *especially* to Billy.

He wants to sit right back down in the dirt. Go back to sleep. He's so exhausted, he can't even hold on to his anger, as vivid as it had been when Steve had realized the noise that woke him up was the car door shutting and Billy speeding out of here. It's fading and Steve is just left feeling hollowed out and needy for a bed and a blanket and a pillow to cry into.

Maybe he'll be pissed off later when he looks in a mirror and sees the damage and his dad gives him one of *those* talks that lasts all through dinner and into breakfast. He can spend the entire day tomorrow railing against Billy and the next time he sees him he'll—

Something snaps.

A twig. A leaf. His own fucking foot when he moves to look.

Steve's grip on his bat tightens. He hefts it over his shoulder, ready to swing if he has to. He whips around, searching the quarry cliffside and the trees surrounding it for any of those faceless mouths and bony bodies that keep him up at night.

It's silent.

Not a sound except for his own labored breathing and his racing heart.

The panic is all in his head. The monsters are gone.

The monsters are gone.

He's safe. He has a bat and the bat has nails and the nails have managed to be very effective in monster-related situations and *he's safe*.

Steve doesn't lower the bat though. He keeps two hands on the handle and starts backing out of the forest, away from the quarry, following the tire tracks. The forest feels alien now that he's alone without Billy or his big, metal car.

Maybe it's the weed or maybe Billy knocked something loose in his head, Steve doesn't care which. He gets moving and gets the fuck out of there.

—

Steve's car is still at the Byers' house. It's a trek to get there. There's a shortcut through the woods he's taken a thousand times since he was a kid, but he sticks to the main roads, still queasy at the idea of being by himself in the forest that had formerly housed more demodogs than he wants to think existed.

The sun is right above him and he's sweating and there are a few benches he passes by that look as comfortable as his bed back home. His jacket is sticking to him so he unzips it and ties it around his waist.

He sticks to the main roads, bat on his shoulder, unwilling to lower it until he's in his car. Gets a few stares because of it and, he guesses, his face—he must look completely off his rocker walking around town like this—so he waves. Nods his head. Shrugs in a *'I don't know why I'm like this either! It's a mystery even to me!'* with all the confidence and cheeriness he can scrape together. It's not much, but no one stops him.

He smiles at Mrs. Wallace down by the gas station who gives him a disapproving *'I should call your mother'* frown. Splitting his lip back

open, he pokes at the cut and winces. He's bleeding again. Great. *Fantastic.*

Going by the cars parked in the driveway, all the Byers are home. Steve considers knocking on the door, checking in with everyone, apologizing to Mrs. Byers for the broken plate and the mess, offer to help clean up, see how Will is doing. Steve hasn't spent much time with the kid, but he's small and cute in that *'look at those chubby cheeks and dimples'* way most kids are and didn't deserve to be a monster's sock-puppet-spy-thing.

But Nancy is probably in there too and Steve doesn't think he can look at her with Jonathan in the same room just yet—thinking about them makes his chest hurt and he *can't do this right now*.

Steve wipes at his eyes with the back of his hand, says, *'fuck'* when his throat starts to get tight and choked and Nancy is fucking strangling him without even knowing or caring.

Steve digs his keys out of his pocket, fumbles and drops them on the ground twice before being able to pop the trunk and shove his bat inside—hurries to get in and drive off and find himself a bed and a blanket and a fucking pillow.

—

Steve's mom is home.

She's standing outside by the pool, her back turned to him, talking on her cellphone. Steve has his hand hovering over the sliding glass door's handle, wanting to go out there and hug her and have her scratch at his head with her long nails like she used to when he was sick as a kid and whisper in his hair *'you'll be all better soon, honey, don't you cry now,'* but he's covered in blood and dirt and goo and—shit—he doesn't even know what other demonic-monster stuff could be on him. His mom would just shoo him away anyways. Tell whoever's on the phone, *'sorry about that, just my son being, well, you*

know'. Like that explains everything about who Steve is.

So Steve goes upstairs. Shuts his bedroom door. The soft thump makes him shudder and all at once he's deflating, knees buckling, wrung out and about to collapse. His back hits the door and he slides down. Sits on the floor for a while and stares at the wall, thinking about nothing. Just breathing. Fighting down that lump lodged in his throat. Sitting in his own stink and blood and—he's so fucking thirsty, christ.

He kicks off his shoes while he's still on the floor. Getting his shirt off is *the trial* and he accidentally catches his nose on the collar trying to pull it over his head—he makes a noise that's even pitiful to him. He manages to get his legs under him, he's shaking so much and the world almost ended and *Nancy had gone off with Jonathan* and Billy's face was as fucked up as his for some reason and he smiled when Steve had called him a '*dipshit*'—Steve buries his face in his shirt, breathes in shakily and snot and blood are coming out of his nose and he's *fucking crying, what the fuck, why*.

He blows his nose. Wipes his face off. Scoops up all his dirty clothes and his shoes and stuffs everything into his trash can, ties the bag closed and double-bags it with the bag underneath and hightails it to his shower. Tries not to think for two entire seconds.

The hot water helps with that. His cuts sting sharply. There's some relief from the steam and the heat, his head settling into a quieter throbbing sensation. The bandaids on his face peel off and get stuck on the drain grate. He leans his forehead on the tiles, the shower-head is pointing down at his back and he stares at the water swirling with pink and brown around his feet.

Eventually, he gets the soap. Gets the shampoo. Conditioner. Cleans up, feels around for any leftover porcelain shards in his hair—he finds three and sets them on the nook in the shower. Tiny little mementos to remember the day. Winces when the shampoo lather drips down and gets in the cuts on his face.

He only turns the shower off when the hot water runs out. His skin has turned bright red and his head is in that pleasant overheated buzz space. Sleep sounds amazing. He'd sleep on the bathroom rug,

right here. Happily. Curl up like some dog and use a towel as a blanket and pillow. Sleep for an entire week just like that with no problem.

Steve uses the hand towel and wipes the steam off of the mirror. It's then that he gets a good look at himself and it's shit. He looks like shit. He looks like he ran into a brick wall for fun and his dad would probably believe that excuse without so much as a raised eyebrow or a condescending '*hm, is that so*'.

Well, you know. Steve Harrington in three words.

"Steve, honey?" His mom says and Steve's head snaps to the closed door. She knocks twice. "You're home awfully early. You all right in there?"

He pictures her long manicured nails and her gold wedding band pressed to the door alongside her ear.

"Just—" Reflection-Steve is giving him a panicked look and there's no way to go about hiding this, "—not feeling too great."

"Oh dear." His mom says. "Well. How about you get in your bed and I'll make you some—some tea? Do you like tea? Black tea is *wonderful* for the immune system. *Transformative*. I'll make you a cup and—oh—we can drink it together. Doesn't that sound nice?"

The bruises. The cuts. The blood. The wild look in his eyes that'll stick around for at least a month like last year. Black tea won't be doing jackshit.

Quickly, he grabs a towel and ties it around his waist. Stops to comb at his hair with his fingers. Not that it improves anything. He still looks like shit.

Opening his door, his mom gasps and Steve wants to slam it back shut, but he crosses his arms, embarrassed, and fidgets and waits for his mom to calm down. All the steam and the heat leave the bathroom. Steve's head starts to pound.

His mom's eyes go wide, looking him up and down again and again, her hands slowly moving to rest on her hips.

“You have *got* to stop getting into fights, Steve. You—you don’t have the temperament for that sort of—of *thing*. It’s just not who you are.”

Not one person in Hawkins seems to think he can throw a punch.

“I know.” He says.

His mom chews on her lip, staring at his face and Steve doesn’t have it in himself right then to do anything more than look over her shoulder at the wall, at his unmade bed.

“You didn’t come home last night.”

“I was at the Byers. Studying with Jonathan and Nancy.” Steve says. “I told you that, remember?”

“Don’t.” His mom holds her finger up. “Did he do this to you? Did he hit you again?”

“No. We’re cool. It’s nothing, okay? *I’m fine, mom.*”

“If he hurt you—“

“—he didn’t!”

“I’ll call his mother right now. I’ll call the police—“

“Mom—“ Steve says and pulls at his hair, rubs at his face and his eyes and that *hurts* almost as much as this conversation and he’d rather be back in the forest, hearing the camaro’s door slam shut on repeat, listening to a demodog growl at him—than right here with his mom looking at him like *that*.

“Honey. . .”

“I’m fine, mom, really. *Really*. Jonathan didn’t do anything.” There’s only so much sweetness left inside of him right now, but he packs his smile with all of it and hopes his mom catches it.

“I don’t know what to do with you.” She says quietly with the tone that says Steve will be thinking about this conversation ten years from now and wishing he knew how to be better. “The school called

this morning.” She sighs. “You can’t be skipping classes anymore. You don’t have the grades to be goofing off like this, Steve.”

“I’m sorry.”

She nods. Gingerly, she reaches up and cups Steve’s cheek in her palm. He leans into her warm, dry hand. It’s strange and uncomfortable and Steve wishes he knew how to make her stop making that face and for her to just go back to how she was when he got home—at the pool, talking to someone else, happy, and living her life which never did have much room for him.

“You worry me.” She says.

“I don’t mean to.”

She pats his cheek. Steps back. The doorway separates them.

“I’ve got lunch with Seline, do you—would you like me to cancel?”

Steve shakes his head. He’ll be all right. He knows he will. She nods and Steve nods and they both move on like they always do, awkwardly and with little eye contact.

“Well. Okay.” She wrings her hands together. “You know where the first aid kit is?”

“Under the sink.” Steve taps the cupboard door under the sink with his foot.

“Good, good. Don’t sleep all afternoon. Do some homework. Study. Maybe work on your application essay?”

School hadn’t crossed his mind once today or yesterday or, really, since he found out about the Upside Down. It’s easy to give his mom the answer she wants. He’s done it his whole life. She might believe him or not.

“Can do, mom.”

He doesn’t know what she’s thinking or if she has any hope for him left, but she leaves, closes his bedroom door with a soft thump, her

high heels clicking on the hardwood in the hall and down the stairs. Steve waits until he can't hear her then undoes his towel and dives onto his bed. Lets all that soreness melt out of him and into the warmth of his blankets.

Steve sleeps for the rest of the day and into the next morning. Dreams of dark tunnels and Dustin's toothy grin lit by a flashlight and demodog growls turning into hushed grunts and Billy straddling him, heavy and warm and aggressive on his lap, panting in his ear, his hand somewhere Steve can't see but can hear so damn clearly. Waking up hard and out of breath isn't new so Steve doesn't think about the *why*, just gets up, gets in the shower and jerks off thinking of no one—just tits and abs and muscular thighs and a golden pendant on tan skin.

He successfully avoids any conversation with his parents who are gone by the time Steve goes downstairs. The note says they've left for Indianapolis. They'll be staying in the apartment downtown until the end of the week. They'll call tonight. The underlying message being that Steve *better* be home.

He crumples up the note, eats a banana, but only manages half with a sore jaw and teeth before he gives up and dumps it, swallows some Tylenol and then gets some chocolate ice-cream out of the freezer as well as a bag of peas he presses to *all* of his face as he eats half of what's left directly from the carton.

School is in half an hour and he considers skipping—Nancy and Jonathan and *fucking Billy* might be there—but the quiet in the house is too quiet and the hairs on the back of Steve's neck are standing on end for some reason.

He gets a knife and holds it and his breath like he knows what he's doing. Waiting for something. Listening for anything.

Nothing happens. No one else is there.

It's cold outside. The sky is as blue and cloudless as ever. It's going to be sunny and warm. The ideal Hawkins weather. Steve stops to triple check the trunk of his car for his bat and heads to school.

Billy's camaro is in the parking lot. So is Jonathan's LTD, which means Nancy is probably here too. Steve hunkers down in his car, drums his fingers on the steering wheel, picks at his busted knuckles, looks at himself in the rearview mirror—shittier than yesterday, but he's alive so he's got that going for him. The bell rings.

Steve gets a few '*what the fuck happened?*' and '*holy shit you got fucked up man*' from people he doesn't know. Tommy sidles up to him to slap his ass and tell Steve he's '*looking good*'. Steve flips him off. It almost feels like they're friends again.

Ten minutes into first period and the rumors have circulated and the school has put two busted faces together and agreed Steve and Billy had gotten into a fight and Steve had, *obviously*, lost.

Sean in English asks if Billy had made a pass at Nancy and if that's the reason they fought. Steve just shrugs. The only thing Billy hadn't done was that.

He keeps to himself for the most part, downs a few more pills, though he's pretty sure it's not doing anything because the pounding in his head and face just gets worse and worse and there's *no point* to being here, he's not paying attention to anything other than the bell and the pulsing in his head. By lunch he escapes to the library to find a quiet corner and a fat book to lay his head on and just *rests* until the bell rings again.

Only sees Nancy once in the halls, but she doesn't see him so he makes a beeline for an empty classroom he's never been in before she does—the teacher looks up from her book once, bored and somehow

not remotely surprised to see his face, and goes back to her reading.

Jonathan is probably hiding out in the dark room or ditched like Steve should have done. Billy is in his own corner of the school being a confusing shithead and Steve doesn't see him once.

The day is boring. Anti-climactic compared to yesterday. Steve spends it either half asleep or holding his head like a thin shelled egg, only dropping it once in Pre-Cal where he closes his eyes too long and nearly slams his face on his desk.

The bell rings for the last time and Steve is out in the parking lot, books and notes under one arm, digging through his pockets, looking for his keys and not finding them.

The car is locked. The windows are all rolled up. The keys are still in the ignition, dangling there, mocking him.

With his books set on the roof of the car, his hands and nose pressed flat to the window—which hurts and makes his eyes well up, but it feels like he's doing something somehow, the more he leans in the better the chance the car will magically unlock itself—he pulls at the door handle again. Still locked. He tries every door. All locked. Past-him had been so responsible, his dad would be proud.

There are a few options. Get on the payphone and call Gerald the Locksmith, which would lead to his dad finding out how *horribly irresponsible* he'd been.

He could bash one of the windows in and blame it on some made-up kids, but then there would be glass everywhere and he'd be driving without a window for as long as his dad's temper lasts.

Steve keeps trying the door handle and the door keeps being locked. His breath fogs up the glass where he's pressing his face against it and he sort of *slumps* onto the car, folding his arms, making a little nest for his head to rest and for the rest of him to deflate and think about what he should do. It's the exhaustion, the foggiest in his head. Maybe there was something in the demodogs' goo or maybe the Upside Down or maybe his brain had enough with being knocked around and decided to kick its feet up and told the rest of him to fuck

off.

The car is cold. The glass is cold. Jonathan's car is still here, which means Nancy is probably still here. *Nancy is here with Jonathan.* Definitely in that nice, cozy dark room that no one uses except for Jonathan and the other geeks. They're probably not even developing photos in there and Steve's chest *aches* and *the car is still locked* and Steve is groaning his frustration and his everything into his elbows and today is supposed to be boring and uneventful and normal—not *this*.

The car lurches, startling Steve backwards. Fists raised. Heart hammering. Ready to fucking swing.

Billy Hargrove sits on the hood of his car. Legs crossed. A cigarette between his lips. Golden curls shining in the fucking sunlight framing a beaten to shit face and it's fucking *stupid* how the bruises and the swelling and the fat lip don't do much to dampen that *glimmer* that makes every chick in Hawkins cream their damn panties.

Steve thinks about just walking home. Abandoning his car. Someone can steal it, *fine*. It might even be worth the months of lectures from his dad.

"Fuck off." Steve says. Spits it at him. Hopes it makes his hair go flat.

"Hello to you too." Billy smiles. Blows smoke at Steve. Leans back on his arm because Steve's car is his new hang and *fuck Steve* apparently.

"Not in the mood," Steve tries to shoo him away, "so fuck the fuck off, please."

"Shit." Billy says. "Really gotta work on your sweet talk, Harrington. I'm no bored country girl about to succumb to your wiles. No wonder your girl dumped your ass."

Steve knows it's a bad idea to punch Billy in the parking lot of the school in front of half the student population and teachers. His face is a mess. He's so goddamn tired. He doesn't want to tempt Billy into driving him over with his camaro, which Steve wouldn't put passed him. Still, Steve has been pushed so far already.

Blood pounding in his ears, Steve gets in Billy's face, his neck snapping back to look up at him—sitting happy as shit on his car—and jabs at his chest. Not to fight, but to make a point and just because he can.

Billy grabs his wrist, fingers digging into his bone, and holds him there so the tips of Steve's fingers are still touching him right in the dead center of his chest just below his pendant.

"What is your deal, dude?" Steve says. "Why are you like this?"

"So *sensitive*. Still not over Wheeler then?"

"Fuck you."

"Touchy touchy."

"Get off my car."

Billy looks thoughtful. Bobs his head. Taps at his cigarette and takes a drag.

"Nah."

"Of course, why would you?" Steve laughs. "That wasn't a question. Get the fuck off of my car, Hargrove."

"Say 'please' and *maybe* I'll think about it."

Steve yanks his hand out of Billy's hold, takes a step back and tries to find some air to breathe and calm down so he doesn't just restart their fight. No tranquilizer here. No Max to put Billy down. But no convenient dishware either. Maybe Billy is as exhausted as he is and they can just knock each other out with one blow each.

"I don't get it." Steve says. "Every day with this bullshit. Every damn day you start something, so what is it? What the fuck is your problem with me? Huh?"

"My problem? Mine?"

Billy jumps down from Steve's car, hand over his chest, hips cocked

and looking at Steve like Steve's a Grade A Moron. It makes Steve's teeth gnash together. He doesn't move when Billy comes in close. Glares right back at him. Wants him to throw a punch and to get whatever's inside of Steve out of him.

"Wanna share with me why my sister was in that fucked up house and had a big ass needle that put me down for *hours*, Harrington? 'Cause I'd love to know."

"Screw you."

"Yeah, that's what I thought."

"You're a fucking asshole."

"And you're a lying piece of shit."

"God," Steve's back hits the side of the car. Rubs at his eyes. Remembers how Max's voice had shook when she told him what went down after he'd been out. Knows he can't tell Billy the truth. "Just. Goddamn, man. I hate you so much."

"Right back at you, sweet thing." Billy says and he *smiles*—actually has the audacity to *smile* at Steve and Steve stares at him. It's all he can think to do. He can't form words for a long moment and his mouth hangs open.

This motherfucker.

"Did you seriously come over here just to annoy me? Because I can think of at least one better way you could've spent the last five minutes."

Billy laughs, loud and obnoxious and the sound grates on Steve's nerves.

He points at Steve.

"I like this you."

Steve rolls his eyes. "Don't you have literally anywhere else to be?"

Billy shrugs. Flicks his cigarette and grinds the bud out with the heel of his boot.

“The nerd’s at AV club.”

Right.

“Can you—just get to the point and leave. Or, you know what, leave. Yeah, actually just leave. That’s the only option here. Bye.”

“If I were someone else, I might be a little insulted by what a little bitch you’re being right now, Harrington.”

“Me? *Me?*” Steve’s voice has gone high and he sounds manic even to himself. “You changed the shape of my nose, but okay. Sure. Whatever. Fuck you.”

And that’s it for him.

The car can go fuck itself. Billy can definitely go fuck himself. School can go fuck itself because he’s never coming back. He’ll drop out and his dad will kick him out and Nancy and Jonathan will get married and Steve will get frostbite and die alone and probably get eaten by demodogs and they can go fuck themselves too.

Steve grabs his books and turns away from Billy and his car and the school. He doesn’t know where he’s going—not home—but if he stays something bad will happen and his head is about to explode and he doesn’t want to know if he can take another punch right now or not.

He’s out of the parking lot and on the road when Billy catches up with him. Billy doesn’t say anything so Steve doesn’t either. They walk silently side by side with no direction. Billy lights up another cigarette. Steve’s irritation and anger and that hot pounding in his chest drain out of him bit by bit with every step.

Stealing a glance at Billy, Steve catches his eye—Billy is already looking at him, watching him—he jerks his head forward. Looks down at his shoes and then at the road.

“What?” He says.

After a minute where Billy doesn't say jackshit—Steve would've thought he'd walked off and left if it wasn't for the sounds of his boots on the asphalt, he starts to rethink the pros and cons of another fight, the biggest pro being he'd get to punch Billy again. The biggest con is he'd probably get his face rammed into the road.

"You locked your keys in your car, right?" Billy says. Steve eyes him warily.

"Yeah, so?"

"Shit." Billy stops walking and Steve does too. He watches Billy's jaw clench. Billy isn't looking at him, but at the tree-line of the forest. For a second Steve thinks he must have seen something and that feeling from this morning is back and crawling up his spine.

Billy's eyes snap to him.

"I was trying to be," Billy cuts himself off, puffs on his cigarette and glares at him.

Steve almost laughs. *Billy is ridiculous.*

"You were trying to be, what, an obnoxious dickhead? Good job, really nailed that one—"

"—*nice*—I was trying to be fucking *nice*, dumbass."

It makes such little sense Steve thinks he must have misheard him.

"What?"

Billy huffs, shoulders passed him—is *his face red? is this motherfucker blushing?*—and starts walking. Steve follows a step behind, staring at the back of his head. It feels like he's in the Upside Down again, but less terrifying and generally more confusing overall.

"No, just. How? By being a dick?"

"By offering to open your car."

It's too difficult not to laugh at that so Steve doesn't hold back, he's

practically in tears and his head is murdering him, but damn is Billy hilarious when he wants to be.

“Beat a guy up, ditch him in the forest, and then be *nice*. Makes sense.” Steve says, struggling to catch his breath and barely managing to get out between laughs, “you have to actually *offer* then, *dumbass*”

Billy turns around and Steve nearly bumps right into his chest. He giggles and snorts right in Billy Hargrove’s face—a face that is stone cold not laughing or smiling and could be a bit flushed though it’s hard to tell under all those bruises, which just makes Steve laugh harder. He doesn’t think he’s ever been this happy in his life.

Billy makes a face, gives Steve a look he has no idea what to think of or do with other than to just look back and wait. A car drives passed them and honks.

“Good luck, Harrington.” Billy says, moves around Steve keeping a good two feet of distance between them and starts walking back towards the school. Probably to get in his camaro, drive to the quarry with some other guy and jerk off with him too.

Steve watches him. Readjusts his grip on his books so his hands don’t hurt as much.

“Wait!” He calls out.

When Billy doesn’t stop or even turn to acknowledge him, Steve grits his teeth and jogs after him. Getting help from Billy has a slim chance of being a lot less soul sucking than getting help from his dad. If it works out he can get his keys and get in his car and get home in time to pick up the phone.

No one will know. Billy might leave him alone afterwards. Steve can go pass out on the sofa and everything will be back to normal.

Catching up to him, Billy doesn’t even look at Steve. He’s got a pleased, smug expression on his face.

“Gotta love it when the king chases after you.”

“Ugh.” Steve says.

Maybe his dad wouldn't be the absolute worst if he admitted to locking himself out.

Up close, in daylight, and after nearly a full day of sleep, the camaro makes Steve wince. Scratches and dents all along the body. It's been washed, but it's as beaten and exhausted as either of them. Max had put this car through hell. Probably on purpose. Steve can't blame her.

Billy pops open the trunk. There's a black dufflebag and a toolbox, the red paint worn off to show the dark metal underneath. The one in the back of Steve's BMW is still new. Pristine. Practically still in the packaging. He's never opened it beyond the first *out of curiosity* time when his dad had given it to him along with the BMW itself.

Billy flips the lid and digs through it, picks out a bobby pin. Not exactly what Steve had been expecting.

"Why do you have hair clips in your toolbox?"

"Always be prepared, or some shit." Billy does the two-fingered salute, cigarette pinched in-between and closes the trunk.

"You were in the boy scouts?"

Billy gives him Nancy's '*you're being too dumb*' look and it startles him enough to put a few more steps between them.

"So." Steve says. "A bobby pin."

"Never picked a lock before?"

"Uh—no."

"You Indiana fuckers are so innocent, jeez." Billy says. He places the bobby pin between his lips, nipping at it with his front teeth, and grinning at Steve. Smiles and tongue and hard muscles, Billy fucking

Hargrove. “We’re gonna pop your BMW’s cherry.”

Steve cringes. “Come on, man.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll be real gentle.” Billy licks his lips and Steve seems to leave his body for a moment.

“Dude. Gross.”

Billy sticks out his tongue and wags it at him.

At Steve’s car, he expects Billy to show off, to drag it out just to annoy him, but Billy’s quick. Only pauses to wiggle his eyebrows at Steve as he pushes the bobby pin into the door’s lock using his other hand to slowly pull at the handle, shifting from his usual obnoxiousness to quiet and focused, lips pursed around his cigarette. Steve has only ever caught glimpses of Billy looking like this at basketball practice when he wasn’t hanging off of his back. Like this, he doesn’t look so intimidating. Mostly he just looks *different*.

Steve clears his throat. Uncomfortable. Warmer than a minute ago. Shifts his focus away and directs his attention somewhere else.

The entire situation has an illegal edge to it. He glances around the parking lot and back to the high school. There are only a couple other cars left—Jonathan’s is gone—and a few students lingering, but they’re not looking at him or Billy.

No one seems to have noticed them. No teachers. No cops. No concerned Nancy. Just good ole Steve hanging out with his buddy Billy who apparently knows how to pick a car’s lock at the drop of a dime.

Steve folds his arms. Hides how tightly he’s gripping his coat sleeves. Tries to look *casual*, which goes to hell at the sound of the car door popping open. He *jumps*.

“You okay there, pretty boy?”

“Peachy as ever.”

“Sure ya are.”

Billy's got the door swung out wide and with both arms is leaning on it and the roof of the car, hair pin tucked away in his hair pulling it back from his face just that much, as smug and full of himself as ever, but the sight unclenches a ball of nerves and stress inside of Steve and the relief is so pure and so fucking good.

The polite thing to do would be to say '*thank you*,' but Billy hasn't said '*sorry*' for leaving him at the quarry or for being the biggest douchebag in Hawkins so when Steve opens his mouth he doesn't know what he's going to actually say, but it's not going to be *thanks*.

"Do you have any of that—" Steve hesitates. The car is unlocked and he can go home now, but his house is empty. His parents are going to expect him to pick up the phone. The medicine is useless. "—you got anymore of that pot?"

Billy is surprised and so is Steve. So Steve makes himself as tall as he can, straightening his back and stops crossing his arms.

Confident, that's who he is.

"Hell, Harrington." Billy says and slaps the BMW's door closed, twirls Steve's keys around his finger and gives Steve a long considering look that starts at his shoes and travels all the way back up. "You're a gutsy fucker, aren't you?"

"Never mind." Steve says. "Forget it."

"Keep your bra on. I got some in the camaro, come on." Billy tosses Steve his keys and Steve catches them without fumbling—*fuck yeah*.

"I'm definitely not getting in the car with you."

"Aw, did King Steve have to walk home? You poor lil thing. Need me to carry you, Your Highness?"

"God, you're the worst."

Carol is sucking Tommy off underneath the bleachers. She's kneeling on a piece of cardboard and he's got both hands in her hair.

The joint is unlit and hanging in Billy's open mouth when he spots them, nudges Steve in his stomach with his elbow and points. It's not the first time Steve has seen Tommy's dick in Carol's mouth and he doesn't really want to see the whole thing play out again.

There are other hidden away nooks in the school, the bleachers had just been the first, obvious choice.

Don't want to get caught? *Do it under the bleachers.*

Neither of them notice they've got an audience. Steve doesn't feel bad about it. He may have known Tommy since they were in diapers, but the guy's a shithead who doesn't seem to want to even bother trying to be less of a shithead and Carol's just as bad. It feels like a different Steve had been friends with them.

Billy doesn't move, sitting on one of the metal rails holding up the bleachers, watching and lighting up the joint silently.

There's no dick Steve would like to see less than Tommy's freckled one, still he gets a bit hot seeing Carol's head move and how much Tommy clearly likes it.

He starts to plan the best way to back out of this without getting caught or having Billy out him, but Billy grabs him by the wrist like he knows what Steve's thinking. Mouths '*shut up*' and puts a finger to his lips, eyes trained on Tommy and Carol, fist raising slowly in the air before he bangs on the nearest metal pole and yells, "YOU CAN DO BETTER CAROL".

Steve flinches at the clanging of Billy's rings hitting metal. Tommy struggles to put his dick away. Carol pulls off and she starts to giggle because this is *Billy Hargrove* and even with another guy's dick in their mouth, women fucking love him. Steve expects Tommy to come barreling at them, but Carol grabs hold of his hand just in time to pull him back and away, throws a flirty '*bye Billy*' over her shoulder,

leading Tommy to another nook where they won't get caught.

Billy waves at their backs and flips them off. It's such a fluid gesture that Steve doesn't have to be high to think it's pretty cool and he rolls his eyes at himself. *Pretty cool. Billy.* Nope.

Then Billy is passing him the joint and he's grinning—*shining* under all those bruises and Steve is smiling right back at him despite himself and everything ever. Neither of their lips start to bleed. It's actually *fun*.

Not life threatening.

Not stressful.

Just.

Fun.

Filling himself with heat and that nice fuzzy buzz that makes the pounding in his head settle, all his aches melting. He's sitting barely a foot away from Billy, whittling down the joint bit by bit and it's genuinely *nice* and Billy is still fucking awful and, *shit*, Steve didn't think that would have been possible. There's definitely something wrong with him.

He passes it back to Billy and watches him, half lidded and puddle-like leaning all his weight against one of the poles, Billy's got the joint in his mouth, straddling the rail now with his shirt practically open all the way to his navel, little golden pendant swinging and catching what little light there is under here and hypnotizing Steve. Head bobbing along with it.

"You hear the rumors?" Billy says.

"Yeah. Literally everyone thinks you beat my ass."

"I fuckin' obliterated your weak ass." Billy is giggling again. It's not as annoying as before.

"If I knew I could use shit outside of my own hands, I would've kicked your ass through the floor." Steve grumbles. Billy passes him

the joint and Steve takes the longest drag possible from it, coughing afterwards.

“Your weapon of choice?”

Steve thinks for a moment, picturing the Byers’ house and all the possibilities.

“Use a chair and knock your face through the wall,” Steve says and examines Billy. Girly lashes and big blue eyes that are getting bloodshot. Split lip slick with saliva and so damn red. “Probably wouldn’t’ve worked though. You got a fat head.”

“Fuck off. My head is pretty as shit.” Billy’s face, surprised and offended gets Steve laughing again and then laughing even harder when Billy steals the joint from him. “Whatever.”

Steve combs his hair back. Tugs at it. Rubs at the back of his neck. He’s starving. He skipped lunch. When he gets home he’s going to eat all the food in the fridge.

Steve cracks his knuckles and tries to rub away the soreness, looks at Billy’s resting on his thighs—busted as his face and painful looking, worse than Steve’s. *His face did that to Billy’s fists.*

Steve shifts, straddling the bar like Billy and loses his balance, nearly falling off of it until he remembers he has feet.

“Most of them think I fucked Wheeler and you got all pissy about it. This school is so fucking cliché if that’s the best they can do. I wouldn’t touch her majesty with the fender of my car.”

Steve snorts. “She wouldn’t even breathe the same air as you, man.”

“Bullshit.”

“She’s got standards.” Ones that Steve was incapable of meeting. “Nancy’s not your type, huh?”

“Not even close.”

“I’m guessing slutty and dumb is what gets you revved up.” Steve

says it without thinking. His face goes hot. His entire body is lit on fire and he goes stiff. *He's blushing*. No matter how fucked up his face is, it's probably easy to tell and from the sharp and aware look no high person should be capable of, Billy fucking notices.

"What about you?" Billy says. Slow. Careful. "High maintenance prudes with a stick up their ass sounds about right."

"Yeah, you got me."

"Nah, I don't think I do."

It feels like he's closer, like he says it against Steve's neck and Steve can smell the nicotine and cologne coming off of him.

Billy spreads his legs wider, gets Steve's attention to go where he wants it and Steve doesn't fight it. They're back at the quarry, the shade from the bleachers changing into the forest and there's Billy in his denim jacket with dirt in his hair and his hand down his pants, looking at Steve looking at him.

Billy leans back, not remotely embarrassed or shy by how hard he is or how his jeans are so tight Steve can see the outline of his dick and his own body is throbbing and excited in a way he doesn't know how to deal with.

"You're staring." Billy's voice has gone quiet.

"Yeah."

"That bitch's show get you going, Harrington?"

Steve doesn't answer. He puts his hands on his lap. Fingers fidgeting, scratching at the seams of his jeans, wanting to touch his dick while he's got all of Billy's attention. He's gone lightheaded and dumb and it's pretty much all Billy's fault.

Billy slides forward on the rail so Steve's knees bump against the inside of his thighs, eyes on Steve he snubs the joint out between their legs on the metal. Steve pushes his knees just that tiny bit more. Billy feels soft and pliable and hot and actually human where they're touching. Steve drags in a ragged breath, waiting for Billy to do

whatever he's going to do. Maybe he'll unzip himself and Steve will get to watch him again.

But Billy gets up. Pats Steve's shoulder with too much strength, knocking him forward, like they're friends and just—leaves Steve to stare at his back, at the empty space on the rail where he sat, the heat of his thighs and the smell of weed the only thing left behind.

“Oh my god, Steve,” Dustin says barely a foot to his left.

This time he does fall off.

—

Dustin appears out of nowhere. He's sweaty, his cheeks bright pink, and looking a little terrified and worried as he tries to help Steve up. Steve waves him off and clambers onto his feet, tries to subtly adjust himself and recover from the whiplash.

“I've been looking for you everywhere—and oh shit,” Dustin starts to whisper, “are you okay?”

“Dustin—I'm fine.”

“Your face looks really rough, like, so much worse than it did yesterday. How are you even opening your eyes right now?”

“Thanks. Really appreciate the confidence boost.” Steve says. Rolls his eyes that are *just fine, okay*. “What are you doing here?”

Dustin blushes and Steve has half a mind to ruffle his hair bald.

“I saw your car was still here and wanted to invite you to the arcade with the rest of the club, kinda like a celebration because we, you know, *saved the freaking world*. Then I saw you talking to Billy and,” Dustin pauses dramatically and holds up a bottle of bear mace from behind his back, “let me tell you, I came prepared.”

Steve snatches it out of his hands. “Do you even know how to use this stuff? You could go blind if you get this shit in your eyes.”

“Good thing I know how to use it then, jeez. Can I have it back now, please?”

“Wait.” Steve turns the bottle over in his hands. It’s rusted on the bottom and a year over its expiration date. “Why didn’t you have this yesterday?”

“It was in the trunk of my mom’s car. I found it this morning.”

Steve doesn’t bother asking *why* Dustin was rooting around in there. “There aren’t even bears in Hawkins.”

“A month ago you would’ve said there weren’t any demodogs in Hawkins. But there were. So bears? Totally plausible, now can I please have it back?”

“Fine.” Steve tosses it to him. “Be careful. Seriously.”

Dustin stashes the mace back inside his backpack. He studies Steve’s face, turning timid.

“Are you sure you’re okay?”

This nerd is so damn sweet.

“It looks worse than it is. I just got a headache is all.” Steve says. Tries to be reassuring.

Dustin nods because he’s a nice kid who actually takes his word. His eyes dart around, searching the bleachers for any sign of, Steve assumes, Billy. “Why were you even talking to him?”

“Because,” Steve scratches at his head and tries to think of a believable answer that isn’t an outright lie, “Actually, I honestly don’t know how to explain it.”

“Did he try to do something again? Is that why his face looks like that?”

“No and no clue.” Another notch to add to the *Why?* board of Billy Hargrove. “If you’ve been looking for me this whole time, did the other’s head over already?”

Dustin smiles up at him, his new teeth white and shiny. “I was hoping you’d drive me?”

“Yeah, sure.” Steve flicks the visor of Dustin’s baseball cap. Dustin catches it before it comes off. Sleep can wait. His parents can wait. “I’m gonna need to borrow some quarters though.”

Notes for the Chapter:

That's it for part one~ It was really interesting writing such different POVs for these two testosterone filled boys. Thank you everyone who's read this, left kudos, and a comment, y'all are super sweet and I appreciate it!

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